

# Defining A Conservative Foreign Policy

By Jeane J. Kirkpatrick

**A** conservative approach to foreign policy should, of course, reflect conservative values, attitudes, and methods. These include a respect for history, for experience, and for the stubborn, unpredictable variability of human beings. The conservative brings to reflection about policy—foreign and domestic—an irreducible respect for individual freedom; a suspicion of government that distinguishes him (or her) from liberals, and an irreducible commitment to citizenship that distinguishes him from libertarians. The conservative understands that the tensions between individualism and patriotism, between self-love and love of country, between realism and idealism, are permanent.

Because conservatives do not expect a revolution in human nature they do not expect that the future will be very different than the past in basic ways. A contemporary American conservative will be as skeptical as the American founding fathers about the probability of a future free of the problems that have dogged past generations. He will therefore be skeptical of schemes that promise what the U.N. Charter promises, to free mankind from the age-old scourge of war. But he will be willing to join in prudent efforts to control aggression.

A conservative approach to foreign policy eschews utopianism. It accepts the human capacity for evil as for good; for indifference as well as empathy; for selfishness as well as generosity. A conservative approach to policy takes account of complexity and conflict without seeking to deny them, and recognizes that there are real costs of membership in communities.

Above all, conservatives worry about growth in the size and powers of government and about the problems of holding government responsible.

Conservatives do not love war, though they admire some of the virtues that war elicits, especially solidarity and courage. They know that war breeds increased powers of government, and that a successful war leaves government bigger and more powerful. In the 20th century it has frequently been noted that it is liberal Presidents that have taken the United States into war—and that they have done so in pursuit of idealistic goals. Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Lyndon Johnson have made the major commitments to the major wars of the century—World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. It was, however, a Republican, George Bush, who committed the U.S. to turning back Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

The human and economic costs of war are so high, and the benefits of peace so great, that the elimination of war and the achievement of secure peace have been an object of both conservatives and liberals in this century. The fact that Democrats headed the U.S. government at the end of World War II meant that the post-war settlement bore the clear stamp of liberal idealism.

It is accurate, I believe, to say that a conservative would not have designed and worked to realize the United Nations— though a good many voted to ratify the Treaty. The U.N. embodies many of the characteristics least attractive to conservatives. It was a new idea. The United States

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Jeane J. Kirkpatrick is a Senior Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute.

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had never been a member of such an organization—having eschewed League of Nations membership. No such organization had ever existed for long. It was global and universal in its aspirations.

Conservatives naturally preferred NATO and other regional alliances to the U.N. The U.N. was based on an abstract idea about a universal organization which would pursue utopian goals. NATO developed out of the very practical need to defend Western Europe and its democracies against Joseph Stalin, who was moving very rapidly across the Continent.

**Expanded U.N. Aspirations.** During the long years of the Cold War, NATO was very useful and the United Nations was not. But in the two or three years since the end of the Cold War the hopes and optimism that had been invested in the U.N. have come back to life again. From the point of view of many, the U.N. is once again the hope of the world. Its prestige as a moral arbiter of international affairs has ballooned in the last years. So has its role in international affairs.

The notion that the United Nations should decide what is and is not legitimate in the domain of international relations has grown more widespread and more persuasive to more people. The idea that force is only legitimate if it is authorized by the Security Council and the Secretary General has spread. The notion that the United Nations should develop its own military forces under the command and control of the U.N. Secretariat finds supporters.

There are now three processes underway which broaden U.N. activities: first, expansion of the number of traditional United Nations activities; second, expansion of the kinds of problems regarded as appropriate for dealing with through the U.N.; and third, the expansion of the discretionary powers of the Secretary General.

All these trends have special significance for conservatives worried about transferring control of important decisions to an international organization over which the U.S. government has limited power, and over which the American people have even less influence.

**Getting Permission.** The first step in broadening the U.N.'s jurisdiction was taken by George Bush, who as President helped create the impression that even self-defense and collective self-defense require formal approval of the Security Council.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in a clear act of aggression across an international border, the government of Kuwait immediately invoked Article 51 and appealed to the United States and others to help mount a collective self-defense. The Bush Administration, Arab neighbors, and others responded not with troops but with Security Council resolutions condemning this act of aggression, and calling for withdrawal of Iraq's troops from Kuwait, imposing a diplomatic boycott, then an economic embargo.

The first resolution condemning the invasion of Kuwait passed on August 2, 1990. On November 29, 1990, the Security Council passed an ultimatum with a date attached—January 15, 1991. Eventually military action freed Kuwait from the hell of occupation. During the months between the Iraqi invasion and the beginning of Operation Desert Storm, Kuwait was devastated, its people murdered, raped, and tortured, its resources sacked. Though some of the intervening period may have been needed to assemble the colossal forces needed to do battle, earlier U.S. air attacks almost certainly could have interrupted Saddam Hussein's forces and slowed their progress.

But instead of acting under Article 51 to assemble forces in defense of Kuwait, the Bush Administration chose to seek specific Security Council authorization for each new step it took. Bush himself explained this course of action because, in addition to defending Kuwait, he was also committed to building a "new world order."

Bush explained his motive to *Newsweek* magazine, "The civilized world is now in the process of fashioning the rules that will govern the new world order beginning to emerge in the aftermath of the Cold War....When we succeed...we will have demonstrated that aggression will not be tolerated. We will have invigorated a United Nations that contributes as its founders dreamed. We will have established principles for acceptable international conduct and the means to enforce them."

The disadvantage of this approach became clear when U.S. forces stopped at the Kuwaiti border and left Saddam Hussein's military forces intact. The grounds that were given for permitting Saddam's forces to withdraw without destroying them was that the U.N. Security Council resolution had not authorized the pursuit of Iraq's forces outside of Kuwait. It had authorized only the action to secure the withdrawal of Iraq's forces. The decision was also shaped by the views of regional governments that destroying Saddam's military forces would create a vacuum into which Iran might move. Still, it was clear that the Bush Administration took seriously the precise terms of the Security Council's mandate. At that point some of the problems became apparent of risking men and money on decisions in which we were but one voice.

**Complicated Civil War.** Problems of committing U.S. forces on the basis of Security Council mandates became more obvious in the case of Somalia. The problem to which the United States responded in Somalia is very different. It was not a case of international aggression but of starvation caused by the deliberate use of hunger as a weapon in a complicated civil war. The initial goal of the U.S., and presumably of the U.N., was to save hundreds of thousands of Somalians from starvation by delivering the food that rival gangs were blocking.

Soon, however, it became clear that the enemy in Somalia was not just starvation, but also civil war and anarchy. The right of U.N. forces to become involved in this civil war is complicated by the existence in the U.N. Charter of a very specific provision asserting "that nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state, nor shall require members to submit such matters to settlement in the international body."

No one much worried about whether the action to feed the starving in Somalia was a violation of the U.N. Charter. There had already been a resolution by the Security Council asserting a right to intervene in case of massive violations of human rights dealings with Kurds in Iraq. The Kurds, however, were on an international border with Iran and Turkey, so the Security Council could and did cite a threat to international peace and security while proposing a right to intervene in that case of massive human rights violations.

**Unprecedented Expansion.** In Somalia no threat to international peace and security was cited or existed. However terrible, the problem in Somalia was not and is not an issue which involves a threat to international peace and security. Therefore, the use of force in Somalia must be seen as a very substantial, unprecedented expansion of U.N. jurisdiction. It is a kind of problem that has never been dealt with by the Security Council in the context of use of military force.

Massive efforts in humanitarian assistance had been undertaken by the United Nations, in Ethiopia, for example, during the Cold War. That action was undertaken, not under Chapter VII, authorizing military forces, but by the United Nations Development Program (U.N.D.P.), or by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who have undertaken massive feeding in situations of starvation and great misery. The authorization of the use of force in Somalia was something new—no matter how ambiguous.

The ambiguity of the Somalia operation produced misunderstanding between President Bush and Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as soon as the agreement had been signed. President Bush believed he had agreed to deliver food to starving people. He expected U.S. forces

would then leave. Boutros-Ghali saw the mandate as laying the foundation for a viable government of Somalia, which is something that Somalia has never had.

One aspect of the Somalia operation was unambiguous: it constituted an expansion of the U.N.'s jurisdiction, and of the Secretary General's power. The Secretary General defined the mandate and then announced that forces were being placed under the command and control of the Secretary General. Though that idea was new then, Boutros-Ghali has ever since proposed placing of forces under his command and control each time he has proposed a new operation or a new phase of an operation. He has suggested that it is somehow better to have forces operating under U.N. authorization work directly under the Secretary General's command and control.

But this is a new and a strange idea. The U.N. Charter is quite clear that military forces should be under the command and control of contributing members and a military staff committee made up of the Chiefs of Staff of each of the permanent members of the Security Council. This is very different than the notion that the Secretary General should command the forces.

There is also no reason the Secretary General's judgment about U.N. action and priorities should take precedence over the judgments of the Security Council. Yet Boutros-Ghali has insisted again and again, even as he assumes new commitments, that the United Nations lacks the resources to disarm combatants in Bosnia, lacks the resources to ensure delivery of humanitarian assistance, lacks the resources to monitor the Serbian border, or the Croatian border, or the safe havens, or do anything effective.

Each effort by the Security Council to modify the terms under which U.N. forces operate in Bosnia has met with resistance from the Secretariat. When the U.N. Commander for Bosnia, Gen. Philippe Morillon, demonstrated extraordinary courage to expedite delivery of food and medicine to Srebrenica last winter, for example, the Secretariat requested his recall. It is not clear why the Secretary General has doggedly opposed effective action in Bosnia. It is clear he has done so.

**Unwelcome and Disturbing.** The expansion of the U.N.'s jurisdiction and the Secretary General's powers are particularly unwelcome and disturbing from the perspective of conservatives. The United Nations embodies almost all of the characteristics that conservatives find unappealing and dysfunctional in political life. It is remote. It is bureaucratic. It operates on the basis of abstract principles rather than precedent. It is difficult to hold it accountable. It is not an effective instrument for dealing with many problems of foreign policy.

It lacks the unity and dispatch often necessary in crises. Aggressors usually act quickly, while the Security Council needs a consensus that takes longer to build. Nine of the fifteen-member Security Council must vote affirmatively on a course of action, and all five permanent members must at least acquiesce. A single veto can block action. Assembling the necessary support may prove time-consuming—or even impossible—as happened last week when an effort to lift the arms embargo against Bosnia failed in the Security Council for lack of nine votes.

Supporters of collective security are often reluctant to face the difficulties that are common to multilateral decision-making, not just in the United Nations but in smaller multinational organizations as well. Even in the European Community—all of whose members are European, industrial democracies—achieving a needed consensus is often laborious, difficult, and time-consuming. Clashing interests and preferences and divergent priorities make the decisive, rapid action required for an effective response to an armed attack wholly impossible.

Conservatives worry a lot about controlling governments. They are right to do so and never more than in regard to foreign policy.

When the United States acts militarily in a U.N. context, it asks American soldiers to risk their lives for causes without direct relation to their identifications and interests. When the U.N. commits forces, the U.S. acquires approximately 30 percent of the bill. When a commitment of forces is made, the American government cannot guarantee the quality of the commander, the weapons, the intelligence, or the forces.

**Protecting Fundamental Values and Interests.** I believe the United States can work with others through the U.N. as long as we preserve the veto and the Security Council preserves the authority which is vested in it. Then we have some assurance of representation of the views and values of American and U.N. decisions. If we don't like its policies then we can take that up with our own government. If the Security Council is not the ultimate authority we are without channels for accountability.

As long as decisions are made in the Security Council, we can protect our fundamental values and interests.

There are problems which are more effectively dealt with through the U.N. than simply bilaterally. The United States can cooperate in a U.N. framework for these purposes. Nonetheless, I believe it is very important to be clear that the U.N. should not frequently be the institution of choice for persons of conservative values. It is too bureaucratic, too remote, and too difficult to hold accountable, too involved in issues unrelated to our interests. As conservatives and as Americans we should avoid falling into the habit of speaking and thinking as if the legitimacy of our policies depended on the United Nations. The ultimate test of the legitimacy of U.S. actions is not a temporary majority of the Security Council; it is the U.S. Constitution. Conservatives have special reason to be clear about that.

